

CARMINA BURANA (“Songs from Benediktbeuern”)

What follows is not a literal word-for-word translation (some of the text is very difficult), but is intended to give the feeling of the text. All settings are for a full chorus, unless stated otherwise.

FORTUNA IMPERATRIX MUNDI: Fortune, Empress of the World

1. Fortune, Empress of the World

O Fortune, like the moon always changing, now waxing, now waning: life is awful – it plays games with your mind and makes poverty and power melt like ice.

Chance, you’re a senseless monster, an unstoppable wheel that turns status bad, health useless, and everything fall apart. You creep up on me all shadowy and veiled and I’ve lost my shirt thanks to your tricks.

My hopes of health and strength are all over the place; my mood is up and down all the time. So without delay let’s strike up a tune and all join in lamenting the way Fortune brings down the strong.

2. Fortune’s wounds

With streaming eyes, I lament how Fortune has wounded me – the traitor has turned her face against me. It’s true what they say – she looks pretty when you first see her, but the mask slips and you see the bare skull beneath.

I used to sit on her throne, with the bright garland of wealth on my head: I was rich and happy – now I’ve come crashing down and all that has been taken from me.

The wheel turns and I come down diminished: someone else sits in my place, dangerously high. The king sits right on top, but he must fear downfall: remember the story of poor Queen Hecuba*, ground under the wheel.

**Hecuba was the mother of Paris and the wife of Priam, King of Troy, when Troy was captured by the Greeks and all her family killed.*

PRIMA VERA: Spring

3. Spring’s cheerful face

Spring’s cheerful face drinks a toast to the world: it puts the vanquished bitterness of winter to flight. Flora* queens it in her colourful dress to a chorus of sweet song in the woodlands. Phoebus* lying in her lap can smile again and all is full of flowers.

The breeze breathes a honeyed fragrance, and we eagerly enter the lists of love. The nightingale trills her song; flocks of birds move through the woods, and bevvies of girls promise delightful prospects!

**Flora is the Roman goddess of spring, and Phoebus another name for the sun-god Apollo.*

4. The pure and gentle sun (baritone solo)

The pure and gentle sun soothes everything and the fresh face of April appears to the world. The minds of men joyfully turn to love at the command of the boy-god*.

The novelty of Spring tells us to rejoice, in our accustomed ways, and in your own springtime it’s right and proper to cling to your own.

Love me faithfully as I am faithful! I am with you totally in heart and mind even when far away. It's torture to be so much in love.

The boy-god is Cupid, the god of love, usually depicted as a winged child.

5. Spring is back

Look, Spring is back, welcome and longed for, bringing joy; the meadow is bright with flowers, and the sun soothes everything.

Now let sorrows depart – summer's coming and the savagery of winter's going!

Now ice and snow are melting and disappearing, the fog flees, and Spring is suckling at Summer's breast.

He's a curmudgeon who doesn't feel alive and frisky under summer's command. May those who strive to take advantage of Cupid's prizes glory and rejoice in the sweetness of honey! At the command of Cypris* let's revel and rejoice as the equals of Paris!*

**Cypris is another name for Venus the goddess of love. Paris was the prince of Troy who started the Trojan War by seducing and running off with Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta.*

UF DEM ANGER: On the village green

*Note: in some of the texts in this part the language is German rather than Latin, and sometimes a mixture of both. Original German text is indicated by being in **bold italics**.*

6. Dance

7. The noble forest

The noble forest bursts out in flowers and leaves.

Girls: Where's my old lover?

Boys: He rode away!

Girls: Alas! Who will love me?

The forest bursts out all round, ***but my lover is missing.***

Girls: ***The forest is greening all round. Where is my lover all this time?***

Boys: ***He rode away!***

Girls: ***Alas! Who will love me?***

8. Rouge (female chorus with accompanying hums)

Girls: ***Pedlar, give me some rouge so I can make the boys fall for me whether they want to or not! Look at me, boys – don't you fancy me?***

Men of action should love loveable women. Love gives you great comfort and the highest glory. Look at me, boys – don't you fancy me?

The world is great, so full of joy. I just can't stop going on about it as long as I live! Look at me, boys – don't you fancy me?

9. Sequence

9a Slow dance

- 9b *What you see dancing here is a group of girls who've sworn off men all summer!*
9c *Come, my lover, I want you so much. Sweet rose-pink lips, come and kiss me better.*
9d *What you see dancing here is a group of girls who've sworn off men all summer!*

10. My daydream

If the whole world were mine, from the sea to the Rhine, I'd give it up just like THAT to have the Queen of England lying in my arms!*

**This is usually thought to refer to Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), the queen of Henry II. She was famously extremely beautiful.*

IN TABERNA: In the pub

11. Angry young man (baritone solo)

Seething inside with violent anger, I talk to myself in my resentment. I'm just a heap of dirt, a leaf that the wind plays with. A wise man builds his house on a rock – a fool like me is a raging river with no set course in life, I'm whisked around like ship without a crew, like a wandering bird swept along in its flight. No chains bind me, no locks hold me, I look for people like me and join up with criminals.

To me being serious-minded is hard work: a joke is enjoyable and sweeter than honeycomb. Whatever Venus commands is an agreeable task, and you'll never find her in the hearts of conventional people.

I follow the easy path as young people do; I get into crime and forget good deeds. I'm only interested in having fun, not the good of my soul: I'm dead inside, but I look out for number one.

12. The roast swan (tenor solo with male chorus)

Solo: Once I lived around lakes; once I was beautiful; those were the days, when I was a swan.

Chorus: Poor thing! Now you're black and thoroughly done!

Solo: The cook turns the spit back and forth; the fire burns me fiercely; the waiter serves me up!

Chorus: Poor thing! Now you're black and thoroughly done!

Solo: Now I'm lying on a platter and can't fly any more: and I can see people gnashing their teeth*.

Chorus: Poor thing! Now you're black and thoroughly done!

**What they used to do in anticipation of food, where we would lick our lips.*

13. The Abbot of Cockaigne (baritone solo with male chorus interjections)

Cockaigne was an imaginary country where the living was very easy. This is a parody of a religious chant.

I, I, I, I'm the abbot, the abbot, the abbot of Cockaigne.

A-and my chapter-house is made up of drunkards,

A-and I belong to the Sect of the Holy Dice,

A-and if anyone comes to the pub with me for matins he'll go out after evensong naked, and after losing all his clothes he'll say "Wafna! What have you done, evil Fate? You've taken all my pleasure in life! Wafna!" Ha ha!

14. In the pub (male chorus)

When we're in the pub we don't think about death, but rush to the gambling tables and work hard there. What goes on in the pub, where money means booze, we'll tell you if you ask.

Some people gamble, some drink, some do shady deals. Some of the gamblers lose their shirts while others win new ones, and the losers have to dress in sacks! No-one thinks about death, but they gamble in the name of Bacchus (*the god of wine*).

The boozers drink to the pub landlady they've made rich; next to prisoners, then to the living; fourth to all Christians, fifth to the faithful departed, sixth to naughty nuns, seventh to freedom fighters, eighth to lapsed friars, ninth to scattered monks, tenth to those at sea, eleventh to arguers, twelfth to penitents, thirteenth to travellers, to the king, to the pope – they all drink without any rules: ladies, gentlemen, soldiers, priests, him and her, man-servants, maids, the energetic, the lazy, the blond, the dark, the sensible, the giddy, the illiterate, professors, paupers, invalids, exiles, strangers, boys, greybeards, civil servants, clergy, nuns, friars, grannies, mums, this lot and that lot – a hundred, a thousand of them...

Winning the lottery would hardly be enough to pay the bill when everyone's boozing away without counting, and though we're just enjoying ourselves people go on about us and say we're going to be broke. Well, confound those who criticise us – may they never get to heaven! Yah!

COUR D'AMOURS: The Court of Love

15. The fickleness of love (children's or women's chorus with soprano solo)

Chorus: Love flies everywhere. He is captured by desire. Young men and women are rightly brought together.

Solo: If a girl has no lover, she lacks all pleasure in life. She carries the depth of night in the most intimate prison of her heart.

Chorus: It is the bitterest thing.

16. Everything is against me (baritone solo)

This text is "macaronic" – it switches at random between Latin and French. French sections are in bold italic.

Day, night and everything is against me. Talking to girls ***makes me weep and often sigh, and makes me afraid.***

Friends, you may joke, but speak up, those who know, and spare me in my misery: ***great is the pain*** – please be aware of it ***for your honour's sake.***

Thy lovely face ***makes me weep a thousand times***: my heart is full of ice. ***To heal me***, you could bring me back to life ***with a kiss.***

17. The girl in the red dress (soprano solo)

There stood a girl in a red dress. If anyone touched it, the dress rustled.

There stood a girl like a rosebud. Her face was bright and her lips blossomed.

18. In my heart (Baritone solo and chorus)

Original German text is shown in bold italics.

Solo: In my heart are many sighs for your beauty, which wounds me grievously.

Chorus: In my heart there are many sighs.

Mandeliet, my lover isn't coming!

Solo: Your eyes shine like the rays of the sun, like the splendour of lightning that brightens the darkness.

Chorus: Your eyes shine like the rays of the sun.

Mandeliet, my lover isn't coming!

Solo: May God – all the gods – agree to what I have in mind: to loosen the bonds of her virginity.

Chorus: May God – all the gods – agree to what I have in mind.

Mandeliet, my lover isn't coming!

19. The indescribable game (male chorus with baritone solo interjections)

If a boy and a girl tarry in a bedroom – blessing on their union!

As their love grows (equally from both sides) and boredom is driven far away, it's an indescribable game for arms, legs and lips!

20. Invitation

Includes some nonsense words "Hyrca, nazaza, trillirivos" repeated as a refrain throughout

Come here, come here, please come! Don't let me die!

You're beautiful – your face, your bright eyes, your hairstyle – what a lovely sight!

Redder than the rose, whiter than the lily, lovelier than anything! I revel in you always!

21. In the balance (soprano solo)

In the scales of my mind two opposing doubts balance: wanton love and modesty. But I have made my choice, and bow my neck to the yoke: I go through with it, and it is sweet.

22. Time to celebrate (chorus with soprano and baritone soloists)

Chorus: It's a merry time, girls; join in the celebrations, boys.

Baritone solo: Oh, I'm blossoming, all on fire with the love of a girl – it's new to me

Baritone solo with chorus: and it's killing me!

Women's chorus: My promise strengthens me; my refusal gets me down.

Soprano solo with women's chorus: Oh, I'm blossoming, all on fire with the love of a girl – it's new to me

Women's chorus: and it's killing me!

Men's chorus: In winter, men aren't interested, but in the mood of Spring they're frisky.

Baritone solo: Oh, I'm blossoming, all on fire with the love of a girl – it's new to me

Baritone solo with chorus: and it's killing me!

Women's chorus: My virginity taunts me, my innocence holds me back.

Soprano and baritone solos: Oh, I'm blossoming, all on fire with the love of a girl – it's new to me

Women's chorus: and it's killing me!

Chorus: Come, my lady, with joy! Come, my lovely one, I'm dying!

Chorus and soloists: Oh, I'm blossoming, all on fire with the love of a girl – it's new to me and it's killing me!

23. Surrender

Sweetheart – I surrender totally to you!

BLANCHEFLEUR AND HELEN

This extraordinary paean to the beloved addresses her in terms from Christianity, classical mythology and mediaeval legend, first in terms usually used for Christ and the Virgin Mary (Light of the World, Rose of the World). Blanche fleur is the name of the beautiful and chaste heroine of a popular mediaeval Romance Floris and Blanche fleur; Helen is the adulterous Helen of Troy, and the last name is that of the goddess of love Venus herself.

24. Hail to the fairest

Hail to the fairest, precious jewel, the pride of all virgins, the glorious virgin. Hail, light of the world; hail rose of the world: Blanche fleur and Helen, noble Venus.

25. Fortune, Empress of the world

The wheel of Fortune has turned full circle and we return to the opening movement.

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